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The Yellow Khan:

or, Frank Reade, Jr. Among the Thugs in Central India.

By "NONAME."



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THE YELLOW KHAN;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr. Among the Thugs in Central India.

A STORY OF DARING DEEDS.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Under the Gulf of Guinea," "The Silent City," "The Black Mogul," "Below the Sahara," "In White Latitudes," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A VICTIM OF THE PLAGUE.

BEYOND Lucknow and over the River Goomtee was a mighty grass-grown plain, extending to mountains far in the smoking distance; for the day was hot beyond description, and Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, as they stood upon the upper platform of the Electric Fakir, were made aware of this.

"Whurroo!" exclaimed the Celt, mopping the perspiration from his brow; "yez wad think Ould Harry himself owned this country. Shure, I'm about roasted."

"Huh!" said Pomp, with a snicker; "yo' kin see wha' youse gwine to come to, chile, 'less yo' changes yo' habits an' libs a bettah life."

Barney's keen eyes twinkled, and he made a side step toward the coon, as if he would tackle him, but the restraining presence of Frank Reade, Jr., obviated this.

They had been three months in the land of the fakir and the Hindoo, and not a day had been devoid of some new and strange incident.

It is hardly necessary for us to introduce formally Frank Reade, Jr., the famous young American inventor of Readestown. Everybody, of course, has heard of him and his famous air ship and wonderful submarine boat.

Not content with having mastered the problems of aerial and submarine navigation, Frank had built and equipped the Fakir. With his two trusty servitors, Barney O'Shea, the Irishman, and Pomp, the negro, he had packed the Fakir in sections aboard a Bombay steamer and set out for the exploration of the land of the Thug and the Khan.

The Electric Fakir was a wonderful specimen of mechanical skill. Nobody but a man with brains could possibly have constructed such a machine.

Frank's purpose had been to devise a vehicle in which they could travel over all sorts of country in safety both from the arms of ordinary foes, or the savage jaws of wild beasts. The Fakir was to be the constant home of the travelers.

With this purpose in view he took the lines of a prairie schooner and elaborated until he gained his ideal. The Fakir was light but roomy, bullet proof and equipped with an electric gun for defense, and furnished with stores for nearly a year's trip.

Frank had used largely aluminum and steel in the construction of the machine. Forward and aft were the cabins or living apartments, and these were equipped most luxuriously.

Amidships there was a section of bullet proof network of steel. In this were loopholes for firing in case they were attacked.

Forward was the electrical machinery operated by a compact storage system which was a secret of Frank's. Over the forward compartments was a dome-shaped little structure with plate glass windows, which was used as a pilot-house. Here was an electric keyboard

with switches and levers by means of which the machine could be guided or driven or set ablaze with electric light.

There was also a powerful search-light on the upper forward deck. Aft on the upper deck was the dynamite gun.

This was nothing but a long cylinder of thin steel, very light, and operated by means of a pneumatic chamber.

The dynamite shell placed in the breach, was expelled by compressed air and exploded by impact. It was a most deadly engine of warfare.

The running gear was wonderful in its construction. The wheels were tired with rubber, and rested upon adjustable springs, which acted so that travel over the roughest ground scarcely jarred the occupants of the vehicle.

To describe the Fakir in every detail, would require too much space, so with the reader's kind permission we will leave this to the course of the story. Suffice it to say, that the machine was in every way equipped for just such a trip as was now being attempted.

Thus far the voyagers had experienced no serious trouble with any of the natives of this strange and superstition-ridden land. Once they had been fired upon in the jungle, but this was doubtless by robbers who would have attacked even their own kind for the sake of plunder.

But above Lucknow there was promise of some danger.

The region was wilder and the natives less friendly, or rather less well disciplined in fear of the white man. But Frank cared little for this.

In fact, it was the very thing he was in quest of, wild adventure, whether with savage men or wild beasts. And there was plenty of this in store.

Lucknow and the River Goomtee had been left far behind. The Fakir had run like a greyhound across the green and level plain.

The mountain ranges were drawing nearer, and the hot day was coming to a close.

Thus matters were when suddenly a ghastly spectacle caught the eye of Barney, who was in the pilot house.

Acting upon impulse the Celt threw back the lever and brought the machine to a dead-stop. Then he shouted:

"Misther Frank!"

Frank Reade, Jr., and Pomp, both came bounding from the after cabin. Barney rushed out on the upper deck.

"What is the matter?" asked Frank.

"Shure sor, wad yez luk at the likes av that?"

Barney pointed to a clump of wild hibiscus, distant not a dozen yards. The spectacle there presented was one fit to fill one's soul with horror.

Groveling in the blistering sands was a human being. He was one of the Rajpoot tribe as could be seen. But his scrim skirts and em-

broidered tunic were torn and soiled, while his coppery features were drawn and agonized.

"Help, Sahibs! help Huzaars! for the love of Brahma, give me help!"

For an instant Frank Reade, Jr., could not help but hesitate.

Humanity was strong in his bosom, but here was sufficient excuse for a refusal in all justification to help a fellow being.

For one word dropping from Frank's lips was sufficient explanation. "The plague!"

The bubonic curse of India was destroying thousands of unfortunate beings. To be sure the Europeans were not so likely to get the disease, yet they did not always escape.

"Golly!" muttered Pomp; "dat am a drefful hard sight. Kain't we do suffin' fo' dat po' chap?"

"Yes!" cried Frank, with impulse. "We can and will!"

He dashed into the cabin and opened the medical cabinet. Here he quickly mixed a disinfectant of the carbolic order and bathed his hands and face. Then he took a couple of vials which he knew to be beneficial in the treatment of the plague and sprung down from the Fakir's deck.

The suffering Hindoo was very weak and faint when Frank reached him. Barney and Pomp, having also partaken of the disinfectant, joined Frank.

The plague-stricken wretch was in the hands of good Samaritans. In less time than it takes to tell it, thin blankets were spread and an awning made over him.

Then Frank gave him medicine to counteract the poison in his veins. Pomp prepared a warm broth, and as the shadows of night came on, he drew a breath of relief and slept.

The disease had been taken at its critical height, and even in that brief space was turned. The life of the Hindoo could now be saved.

Until morning the travelers watched over the sick man. When daylight came he opened his eyes, and it could be seen that the fever was gone. He was saved.

Of course he was very weak. But at this juncture friends came.

There was the thud of feet on the sandy floor of the plain, and looking up Frank saw a camel coming with long strides. Upon its back was a Hindoo woman of large, strong frame and comely features.

"Zara!" gasped the sick man. "Praised be Brahma! I am happy now!"

The camel knelt and the woman leaped down and rushed to the side of the sufferer. She chanted something in the Hindoo tongue and then cried in English:

"Praise Brahma! My prince is saved! He will live! Bless the noble Huzaars who have saved the life of my Prince!"

Then she flashed her dark eyes upon Frank, and springing forward clasped his knees, chanting her gratitude. The young inventor gently disentangled himself, and said:

"Are you his wife, mem-sahib?"

"He is my lord and master," she replied, fulsomely. "Ah, Zara will not forget the noble Huzaar. They are not all hard of heart and selfish of soul. Brahma will bless him!"

"That is all right," said Frank, lightly; "I am glad to have done your husband the service. But he is yet ill, and must needs have good care."

"Zara will die for him!" cried the woman, rapturously; "but see, noble sahib, the plague is gone and he is safe."

The sick man now held up his hand and beckoned to Frank. The young inventor drew nearer.

"I am Soma," he said; "once my ancestors were kings of this Province of Oude. The Chuttee Menzil of my father was the noblest palace in India. The Huzaars destroyed our kingdom and I have sworn with my caste to destroy them in return. But from this moment I renounce the vow. I will never lift my dagger against the Huzaars again."

Like a flash Frank read the truth. He knew enough of the traditions of the Rajpoot people to understand that many of them yet held to the rancorous hatred of the English, and that this man Soma was no doubt one of that deadly brotherhood which lurked in the jungle and plotted murder day and night.

He gave a little shiver and only made reply:

"Your resolution is a worthy one, sahib. Hang to it! Good luck to you and may you recover!"

"Salaam, sahib!" said Zara, bending to the earth. Then she turned to her husband's side.

The three adventurers sprang back aboard the Fakir. Frank started the engines and quickly the spot faded from view.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" said Pomp. "I hope we don't git dat plague ourselves."

"There is little danger," replied the young inventor; "but I'll tell you what I think, and that is that we have not seen the last of Soma or his wife, Zara."

CHAPTER II.

A RESCUE.

"BEGORRA, Mистер Frank," exclaimed Barney, "phwat do yez mean by that?"

"Well, it is my opinion that the man whose life we have just saved is no ordinary Hindoo. He is some high dignitary among the jungle Thugs, and you can be sure of it. For that matter, he may be very near to the Yellow Khan whose hidden kingdom we are in quest of."

Barney gave a low whistle.

"Jist as loike as not," he agreed. "Shure, these Hindoos all have

so many brotherhoods an' saycret societies that yez kin niver know what to be after expictin' next."

"Well," said Frank, seriously, "I fully expect to see more of Soma."

The day was now well opened. The air, however, was tempered by a cooler mountain breeze.

Before noon the plain merged into broken, hilly country. Then intervening to the far mountain ranges was a vast expanse of jungle.

Frank's eyes sparkled.

"In that jungle," he said, "we may look for some interesting adventures."

"Begorra, that's good news!" cried Barney; "shure, I'll be after gettin' everything ready fer action!"

"Oh, there is plenty of time for that," said Frank; "hello! what's that over yonder?"

The young inventor pointed to a distant rise of land, where there had suddenly come into view what looked like a caravan.

There were three elephants with three occupants in each howdah, and a number of natives on foot.

But what attracted Frank's attention was the fact that they seemed to be in trouble.

The elephants came to a halt upon the high land, and the occupants of the howdahs began firing rapidly with their guns.

Those on foot sank down behind rocks and other cover and did the same.

The crack of the fire-arms could be plainly heard by our adventurers, and Barney cried:

"Shure, Mистер Frank, there's a foine ruction goin' on over there."

"So it seems," agreed Frank; "let us go over and see about it."

This suited Barney and Pomp. Instantly the Fakir started for the spot.

As the machine came grandly rolling down toward them the Hindoos were amazed. In fact, in their surprise they almost forgot the presence of their enemy in front.

As the Fakir drew down upon the scene Frank took it in at a glance.

The caravan people were Parsee and Hindoo merchants traveling through the country, and their opponents were jungle robbers.

It was apparent that the caravan people were not a little inclined to be afraid of the Fakir. The elephant tenders picked up their pikes to affect a retreat.

But Frank sprang out on deck and waved his arms in token of amity. This was not without effect.

The next moment the Fakir rolled up to the spot. The jungle robbers were in the deep grass below, their white turbans showing at intervals.

It was not their method to openly attack a foe. Their game was to follow stealthily behind and harass a caravan, picking off the able men one by one.

In this way they would force the hapless travelers to surrender. But their fate was sealed in any case, for the jungle gang never spared a prisoner. It was certain death to fall into their hands.

Frank ran his eye over the scene and quickly decided what to do. A number of the caravan people lay dead upon the ground.

The position of the robbers was one of great vantage, for they were not exposed. Frank selected the spot where he believed the mass of them were congregated.

Then he went aft and sighted the electric gun. He pointed it down the incline so to sweep it and then placed a bomb in the breech.

He closed the magazine and pressed a button. There was only a slight recoil, a hiss, and then—a thunderous roar and an earthquake like shock.

The explosion of the dynamite shook the hillside and sent the robbers fleeing for their lives to the jungle beyond. A great furrow was plowed in the side of the hill and a half dozen dead Thugs lay exposed to view.

The caravan people were amazed. They had seen the great field guns of the Huzaars, but nothing like this. For a moment they appeared the victims of terror.

But Frank quickly reassured them by leaping down from the Fakir's side and approaching them openly. He was met by a tall, patriarchal old chap, who made a low salaam.

"Mohammed bless thee, noble sahib," said he, devoutly, "thou hast done us a kind deed!"

Frank saw at once that the speaker was a Mohammedan. But he spoke English fluently.

"You are welcome, sahib," said Frank, briefly. "We came along just in time. But have you traveled far?"

"From the land of Hafzan Oolah," replied the caravan keeper. "We have bartered in silver and pearls with the Maghul. Those dogs would have made a good haul had they overcome us. Noble Huzaar, Ben Ali owes thee thanks."

"I am not an Huzaar," replied Frank. "We are from America, a land on the other side of the earth!"

The caravan keeper looked puzzled.

"We know only the Huzaars of your color," he said, "but I dimly remember hearing your land spoken of. It is a strange chariot you travel in which requires neither horses nor elephants to draw it."

Frank knew that it would be idle to explain the workings of electricity to this ignorant old fellow. He would have believed it only witchcraft.

So he nodded his head simply and then made reply:

"We have traveled far in it. But tell me, Ben Ali, heard you ever of the Yellow Khan?"

The Mohammedan gave a mighty start. He ran his eye shrewdly over Frank again and then said:

"Aye, master, that I did. In all the north of India, he is the richest ruler!"

Frank's eyes glistened.

"Where is his country?" he asked.

The aged Mohammedan turned and studied the distant northern range of mountains for a moment. Then he pointed to a distant notch in the blue line.

"Yonder, sahib," he said, "beyond that break in the mountain wall. But dost thou know of the Khan and his ways?"

"Ah," said Frank, carelessly. "What about him?"

The Mohammedan shivered.

"By the dust of the Prophet," he said earnestly, "it would be well for thee to shun the land of the Khan. He welcomes not a visitor from foreign lands. Many have entered his country and never returned."

"I thank you for the warning, sahib," said Frank, courteously, "but what is this? Are those rascals coming back to get another dose?"

A bullet had whistled by Frank's ear. He changed his position, and shouted to Barney:

"Send another bomb down there, Barney; they are not satisfied."

"All roight, sor!"

The Celt obeyed orders. He sighted the gun at a point further away and fired it. This had a salutary effect.

It drove the robbers literally into the jungle. They then abandoned the attack. Meanwhile the caravan had begun to move on.

They expressed their gratitude to Frank warmly. The young inventor said:

"Rest easy during the rest of your journey. They will not venture to attack you again. They lay in our course, and we will drive them before us."

Then he went back aboard the Fakir. In a few moments the machine was making for the jungle.

Frank noted well what Ben Ali had told him. But he had known from the first what sort of a man the Yellow Khan was.

He had become interested in the project of finding the Khan and his country through the fabulous stories he had heard of this strange ruler, whose land had not been visited by civilized Europeans for many centuries.

Frank fancied that this might be one of the wealthy rulers spoken of by Marco Polo, the ancient Indian traveler. He had acquired a positive mania to ferret out and make friends with the Yellow Khan. He had heard many curious stories of this noted ruler.

He had been told that the unknown ruler had gained the name of yellow from the fact that everything about him was of that color.

There were enormously rich gold mines in his kingdom, and there gold was as common as iron elsewhere. It was the common metal.

All these things had inflamed Frank's passion for research and discovery. He had at once made up his mind to ferret out the Yellow Khan.

If the old chap was so incorrigible and unfriendly, perhaps he could be brought to terms forcibly. At least, Frank had the wherewithal to do this.

So as far as fear was concerned he had no compunctions whatever in invading the Khan's country. He need fear but one thing with the Fakir, and that was artillery.

That the Khan did not possess such he was sure. But this was matter for the future. For the present other matters claimed his attention.

The jungle robbers had fled before the Fakir in certain terror. The deadly work of the electric gun appalled them.

In a short while the mighty depths of the Bhungi Jungle swallowed up the Fakir and our adventurers.

They were destined to have some thrilling experiences ere they should emerge from it.

In the jungle the Thugs had a decided advantage.

They could secrete themselves sometimes within a few yards of the machine.

Then they could fire at this short range without incurring retaliation. But their bullets did no harm.

Barney and Pomp, safe behind the bullet proof screen, watched for the slightest target and took advantage of it. And thus the machine crept into the jungle.

It was necessarily slow progress.

In places the paths were very narrow. But the Fakir was provided with revolving knives set upon the hubs, which cut a wide swath through the tall cane.

Where any other object of a solid character was presented, a dynamite bomb quickly displaced it.

Thus the explorers kept on for the rest of the day. When night began to fall apprehension increased.

A suitable place for a camp was selected and the machine brought to a stop. Then Pomp prepared the evening meal.

Darkness would seem to favor any attack or plan of the foe, but Frank did not seem a victim to fear.

"Let them try it," he said, grimly; "they won't try it more than once."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE JUNGLE.

THE darkness which descended upon the jungle was of the most intense description. Words cannot describe it.

But the search-light and the electric lamps of the Fakir dispelled it for some distance about, though even this glare could not penetrate the cave very far.

And now the jungle became a veritable pandemonium. Where previously only the songs of various wild birds had been heard, the yells and howls of innumerable wild beasts came from all quarters.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Barney; "I really would not care to be afoot this night. Shure, a man wud sthand moighty little chance agin thim craythurs."

"Golly!" cried Pomp; "dere mus' be a heap ob tigers an' fings out dere. Dis chile don' want no paht ob dem."

But there were human beings in the depths of the jungle, and in plenty, as our adventurers knew. But doubtless they had the secret of keeping out of the way of the beasts.

Time passed on. Thus far no sign of the natives had appeared. But there were plenty of other foes in sight.

Snapping jaws and gleaming eyeballs could be seen in the dense growth of cane, beyond the circle of electric light. Within this circle the animals did not dare to come.

Barney and Pomp once ventured a shot at a pair of fiery eyes.

"Shure, naygur!" cried Barney, "if yez will put out the roight one I'll take the left."

"A'right, f'ish!" replied Pomp. "I bet yo' I hit de mark!"

Then they fired together.

There was no doubt but that they did hit the mark. With a mighty howl of deadly pain a huge, man-eating tiger, sprung out into the circle of light and fell dead in a heap.

This was fun for the two jokers. They began firing at every gleaming eyeball in sight.

And soon they had killed quite an array of animals of all kinds. But they tired of this kind of sport after a time.

The midnight hour came and Frank and Pomp turned in, it being Barney's first watch. They were soon sound asleep, for they were very tired.

Barney was left to his own device, and for a time he walked up and down the screened deck in a light frame of mind. He had been two hours on guard, when a thrilling incident occurred.

Suddenly the Celt heard a distant peculiar sound. Then animals of every description began running madly past the Fakir.

The distant sound was like that of the roar of a cataract, and for some while the Celt was puzzled.

"Phwat the devil is up?" he muttered. "Shure, I'd think there's a big fa l of wather comin' this way!"

Great numbers of frightened animals sped by the machine. Then came something else which gave the Celt a chill.

This was a perfect army of snakes. They were mainly cobras, but they went wriggling under the wheels of the machine in legions.

The Celt was astonished and was just upon the point of arousing his companions, when a sudden revelation of the truth came to him.

It was through the agency of his nostrils. He sniffed the air, and then turned deadly pale.

"Howly Mither!" he gasped; "it's quare I niver thought av that. Shure, it's foire!"

Then he sprung the electric alarm. Frank and Pomp came tumbling on deck.

"Howly murther!" screamed Barney, "the jungle is on foire, an' shure it's burned up intoirely we'll be."

"Fire!" gasped Frank. "By Jove, I should say so! It's the work of those rascally Thugs!"

For a moment the explorers were aghast at the prospect. Certainly it was a serious one.

To attempt to outrun a fire in the dense jungle would be impossible. What was to be done?

It looked certainly as if their fate was sealed. This was an unlooked for calamity.

But Frank Reade, Jr., knew that immediate action was necessary. They must at least try to get out of the scrape.

So he adopted the only move in view. A path led to the right. As near as he could judge the fire was advancing from the other direction. To run before it would be folly.

An oblique course was the best, for they might turn its flank, so to speak. So without hesitation he turned the Fakir into the side path.

As good fortune had it, this was much broader than the path they had entered by, and the Fakir ran on at fairly good speed. But there was need of this.

The dull booming of the flames was fearfully near at hand, and even sparks could be seen flying through the cane growth. This was evidence enough that the danger was near at hand, and that no time must be lost in getting away from it.

This was no easy task. Indeed, it looked utterly hopeless.

The adventurers had little to guide them but the roar of the flames, and they could only guess at the extent of the fire. The electric search-light lit up the path ahead.

And every few moments they ran down one or more fleeing animals. How many hundreds of deadly cobras were crushed by the wheels it was impossible to guess.

On and on they sped into the dark heart of the jungle. Suddenly Frank gave a sharp cry.

He jammed the lever down hard and brought the machine to a halt. The reason for this was distinctly apparent.

The glare of the search-light had flashed upon something bright and gleaming just ahead. Frank recognized it at once. It was water.

They had come to the banks of a river which flowed through the jungle. In this Frank recognized their salvation.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "We are all right now. Get out the paddles, Barney."

The Fakir had been constructed for just such an emergency as this. There were strong paddles to affix to the axles of the machine, which enabled her to stem any current and make fair speed, for she was so constructed that she could easily float.

Frank knew that in traveling across country he would have many rivers to cross, and thus had made adequate provision.

Barney lost no time in getting out the paddles. They were quickly fixed to the hubs. Then the Fakir ran down into the stream.

She shot out from the shore with the greatest of ease. Into the middle of the current she went. There was no doubt but that the jungle river was deep.

Moreover, it flowed to the north, and as near as could be judged, the flames had not as yet reached the river banks. If the danger point could be passed, they would succeed in completely escaping the fire.

So Frank put on all speed, and the Fakir shot down the current, and now a good estimate of the extent of the fire could be gained.

A great red glare was against the western sky. It was plain that the Thugs had sought to drive their foes toward this very river, thinking that it would be such a barrier that they must surely be entrapped and perish.

"They will be surprised," muttered Frank. "This is the time we shall easily fool them."

Soon it was apparent that they had passed the danger line. Then the river took a great bend.

This brought the voyagers full upon a part of the burnt district. The fire yet smoldered in the great black waste of the fallen cane.

But what interested the explorers most was the sight of numberless moving forms which seemed to be following in the wake of the fire. Barney gave a low whistle.

"Whurroo!" he exclaimed; "it's the devils thimselves. Phwat do yez say, Misher Frank?"

"Certainly!" agreed Frank; "if they knew where we are at this particular moment they would be surprised."

"Shure, an' won't they see us?"

Frank sprang into the pilot-house and turned off the electric lights. Then the Fakir floated on into deeper shadows.

As the river flowed toward the Yellow Khan's country Frank allowed the machine to keep along in the current. It was as easy a mode of progression as any he could devise.

But the hours had been speeding and it was now very evident that dawn was near. Soon light began to break in the east.

But now the burned district had given way to the dense jungle again. Moreover, the river had veered its course to the west.

So Frank decided to go ashore. This proved no easy matter, for the banks had become high and almost impossible for the Fakir to climb.

Finally, however, Frank found a crossing, or ford, and here there was a deep enough cut in the bank to admit of the machine making a landing. Once more the Fakir was on dry land.

A path led away to the northward, and soon the party were again en route to the land of the Yellow Khan.

They had good reason to congratulate themselves upon having so cleverly outwitted the jungle robbers. But a great surprise was in store.

Suddenly, as the Fakir turned an angle in the path, down from the branches of a couple of trees on either side there fell a number of huge ropes made of fiber. There was no time to check the speed of the machine.

It went plump into the obstruction. The ropes were tough and strong enough to almost stop a locomotive. As it was, the machine came to a halt, the dynamos buzzed and the wheels kicked up a cloud of dirt.

One of the ropes caught the dasher, another lay over the pilot, and yet another across the pilot house. A fourth became tangled with the forward wheels. The Fakir could not go a step further.

So sudden was the stop that Barney, at the wheel, was nearly thrown through the pilot house window.

Frank Reade, Jr., reeled into a corner of the cabin, and Pomp fell down the galley stairs. In a moment Frank was out on deck.

"What is the matter?" he shouted. Then said no more, for he was able to see for himself.

He gazed at the ropes in amazement. Not a human foe was yet in sight.

Barney had recovered himself and tried to back out of the trap. But his effort was in vain.

"Howly murder!" he cried. "We're caught like a rabbit in a snare. Shure, sor, it's too strong for us!"

Frank saw that this was the truth.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF THE JUNGLE.

THE young inventor sprang forward and surveyed the situation. Of course it was a clever trap set by the jungle natives.

But where were they?

Why did they not come to the attack? This was what puzzled Frank.

But it was certain that they did not. They had some other purpose in view.

For some moments Frank studied the situation. He was not a little bit puzzled.

Of course it would have been an easy matter to cut the ropes by venturing outside to do it. But this would have exposed one to a deadly shot from the foe.

Doubtless this was just what they were waiting for. And as Frank realized this he knew that it behooved them to use caution.

Barney had already taken an ax and was about to go out on the forward platform. But Frank enjoined him against this.

"You will get a shot from the foe, Barney," he cried. "Better be on the safe side."

"Shure, sor, phwat are we goin' to do?" asked Barney.

"I can't say just now," replied Frank, "but I think we will find some way out of the scrape."

The young inventor was keeping a close watch of the cane brake. Suddenly he saw the flash of a silken jacket.

Instantly he picked up his rifle and fired at the spot. There was a loud yell of agony, and one of the Thugs reeled out of a clump of undergrowth and fell in plain view of the voyagers.

Frank smiled grimly.

He knew that his first theory was correct. The Thugs were in hiding all about the spot, and were simply seeking to decoy their intended victims out into the open.

But with this expose of their game they abandoned it, and the jungle resounded with their mad yells. It was evident that they regarded the Fakir as absolutely in their power now.

They at once made a bold attack upon it. And this was their mistake.

From every covert and clump of undergrowth they bounded forth with keen knives and guns in their hands.

They fired a volley, and the bullets rattled against the hull of the Fakir.

But they did no harm, whatever. In an instant the Thugs, hundreds in number, swooped down upon the machine.

It was a critical moment.

Frank realized this, even though he felt that the villainous gang could hardly succeed in getting aboard the Fakir. He did not attempt to use the electric gun.

Instead, the three defenders, with repeating Winchesters, opened fire upon the foe. A rattling volley for a moment arrested them.

But they rallied and came on again. And now they were met by another. But still they came on.

"Lively!" cried Frank; "they'll be aboard of us. We must not allow that!"

But even as the words escaped his lips a number of the Hindoos gained the forward platform. They threw themselves against the pilot house door.

But it was of stout steel and would not yield. In vain they tried to batter it down.

Frank opened fire on them from a loophole which was almost point blank, and so deadly was the range that the rascals staggered and finally retreated precipitately. But another gang were trying to gain the upper deck aft.

Barney and Pomp, however, were doing valiant service here. As Frank rushed to assist them they had also gained a victory.

The Thugs were plainly astonished at their inability to get aboard the machine. At least a dozen of their number already lay dead on the ground. This was demoralizing, to say the least.

And now Frank played his strongest card. Aft he went to the dynamite gun and placed a bomb in the breach.

He did not dare use it at such short range for fear of the shock to the Fakir. But he saw a number of the Thugs at some distance away in the cane.

He sighted it for them and fired it. The bomb burst with terrific force in that part of the jungle. The cane was mowed down in great rows, and a hole was blown in the ground large enough to bury a hundred men.

This was the turning point. The Thugs were not accustomed to battling against such tremendous power as this. It was terror for them.

They broke out and fled incontinently. It was a great victory for our voyagers.

Barney and Pomp cheered themselves hoarse.

"Shure, they're not in it!" cried the Celt. "We've given thim the koid av a batin' yez read about."

Frank sent another bomb after them with deadly effect. Then the question of liberation from the ropes once more presented itself.

It was Barney who hit upon an idea.

"Faith, I'll show yez how to cut thim!" he cried. "Kape yer eye on me."

With this he aimed at one of the ropes with his rifle and fired. The bullet went true to the mark.

One of the strands was seen to burst, and the rope trembled. Pomp caught the idea readily.

Again Barney fired. This time he missed, possibly owing to the vibration of the rope.

But the next time he cut another strand. The fifth bullet cut the rope. Then Pomp cut the one he was firing at.

But the remaining rope was entangled badly with the running gear. This prevented the forward axle from turning.

It seemed as if this could only be liberated by venturing outside. Frank, however, saw a way to make this safe.

He sent a dynamite bomb into the jungle on that side. It cleared the hiding-places in that vicinity.

Then Barney dropped down under the running gear. So quickly did he work that he had the rope cut in a score of pieces before the Thugs realized that he was under the vehicle.

One bullet brushed his ear, but did no harm. He returned safely to the deck of the Fakir.

It was a successful game. The machine was now all right again and Frank started her ahead. The fragments of rope dropped out of the running gear and the Fakir was free.

A parting volley from the Thugs did no harm, and the Fakir soon had left the scene far behind. For hours it threaded its way through the jungle.

Then the ground began to rise and the cane to thin out. Very soon open country was seen ahead. They would soon be out of the jungle.

The day was drawing to a close and Frank was anxious to get out into the open country before dark. And in this he was quite successful.

The Fakir emerged from the deep jungle and mounted a rise from which the voyagers could look back and see from whence they had come. A distant line of flame and smoke told them that the jungle fire was not out yet.

Ahead of them were the mountains. Beyond these was the region of upper India, bordering upon Mongolia and Tartary. In that part of the country the Yellow Khan held sway.

Frank noted again the notch in the mountain line, showed him by Soma. He reckoned it was not more than thirty miles away.

Another day should bring them to it with ease. Were the course a level and smooth one, it would not require two hours.

But night was shutting down, so Frank selected a good place to camp and await the coming of another day. It was upon an eminence from which a view could be had in all directions.

Here the night was passed without incident. The jungle robbers had evidently had sufficient experience with the Fakir. They were quite content to keep their distance.

For this Frank was grateful. He did not wish to slaughter any more of them, and was content to remain in peace. At an early hour the Fakir was again under way.

Rapidly now they drew nearer to the mountains. For a long time no sign of a human habitation had been seen.

The country had seemed one mighty wilderness, uninhabited save by the jungle people. But now right at the base of the mountains a surprising thing was seen.

This was nothing less than a vast collection of buildings, with a long, high wall around them. It was a Hindoo walled city of the ancient type.

This Frank saw at a glance. He also saw that it was right at the entrance to the notch between the mountains. It would be necessary to pass right by this curious Hindoo town.

Of course the voyagers were at once interested. They did little but watch the distant town as they went on.

Soon a long and fertile reach of upland was seen extending far to the west along the base of the mountains. This fertile tract was all cut up into native farms.

In fact, the region seemed quite thickly populated. There were numerous bungalows, or light bamboo huts, and the fields were being tilled by swarthy natives with ox and rude plow.

Frank drew a breath of relief.

"There is nothing to fear from an agricultural people," he declared. "They are not warlike. Let us make their acquaintance."

"Begorra, that's phwat I loike to hear!" cried Barney. "Shure, mebbe they kin tell us about the Yellow Khan."

"Just so!" agreed Frank. "We will cultivate their acquaintance."

So the machine bore down toward the Hindoo city. A large throng of people were about the gates.

As the Fakir was seen approaching, the people seemed seized with a panic and rushed into the city, closing the big gates. Frank, however, displayed a white flag and advanced until within hailing distance.

He was not familiar with the Hindoo tongue, and it was doubtful if any of these people knew the English tongue. At any rate, Frank's hail was not answered.

He repeated it and showed himself on the forward platform. Then a Hindoo appeared on the city wall and answered the call.

But Frank could not understand him, nor could he make himself understood. This was awkward and embarrassing.

But just at this moment Barney gave an exclamation and pointed to a party of Hindoos approaching on camels.

"Whisht, sor!" cried the Celt. "Now that looks to me moighty loike the wan that yez doothered fer the plague. Phwat do yez think?"

Frank turned with a startled cry.

"It is," he exclaimed; "it is Soma and his wife, Zara!"

The woman rode upon the same camel with her husband, and they made surprised and delighted gestures as they approached.

CHAPTER V.

THE CURIOUS WORSHIPERS.

How Soma and his party had succeeded in overtaking the machine so quickly was a mystery to Frank. But the truth was they had come by another route.

They were surprised themselves to see the Fakir and its people here.

As Soma declared afterward, he had expected to find the Fakir in the Yellow Khan's country. But the progress through the jungle had been slow.

Up came the camels, and Soma, now quite restored, dismounted and walked slowly to meet Frank. His face was aglow with surprise and delight.

His companions were Hindoos, but evidently not of his own high caste. They remained at a respectful distance.

"Salaam, Master!" cried Soma with an obeisance; "this is a surprise. We have overtaken you with our slow camels!"

"It was the jungle!" said Frank.

Soma's face changed.

"Ah, you had trouble there?" he asked.

"We did!"

"Did they attack you?"

"Yes, with weapons and with fire. But for the river we should have fallen victims to the flames!"

"Brahma forbid!" said the Hindoo, devoutly; "but what is this? Will not these foolish people open to you? We shall see!"

He spoke quick and impassioned words to the gate tender. It was evident that Soma was no stranger here.

His words had the necessary effect. The gates swung open.

But as they did so out rode a cavalcade of a hundred mounted men, with high-strung horses and armed to the teeth. They made an imposing appearance.

At their head rode a tall and handsome young man, with long curling mustache and a resolute cast of features.

His eyes flashed under his fiber helmet as he glanced from Soma to the machine.

Soma bowed profoundly low, as did his wife.

"Salaam Prince Harkoona!" he cried, in the Rajpoot tongue. "We are your faithful slaves!"

The Prince of the Province, for such he was, reined his horse up close to Soma, and in a stern voice asked:

"When did you join hands with the accursed Huzaars, you, Soma? What outlandish thing have they come here with to destroy us?"

"Oh, my prince," cried Soma, "these are not Huzaars! They are of the powerful race at the far end of the earth known as Americans!"

In an instant Harkoona's face changed. He leaped from his saddle.

"Do you speak true, Soma?"

"That I swear, my prince!"

The Hindoo prince turned and gazed at the Fakir for a moment. Soma made another profound bow.

"You would yield these strangers welcome, my prince, if they had done for you what they have done for me."

Then Soma detailed his sufferings with the plague, and how Frank had saved him. The prince listened with deepest interest.

Then Frank came down from the Fakir's side to greet him. In a few moments these two men were the warmest of friends.

For the prince seemed to take an instant liking to Frank. He went aboard the machine and Frank showed him all over it. Harkoona was delighted.

He could speak English quite well, so it was easy to hold conversation with him. When the Hindoo prince learned that Frank was bound for the land of the Yellow Khan, he was at once deeply interested.

"I hope you will meet him and teach him a good lesson, sahib," said the prince; "he is the worst barbarian in all the north of India. Our people cannot go over the mountains without the danger of a conflict with him. He has a number of times threatened to descend upon our province and wipe us out of existence."

"Then he is disposed to be friendly with no one?"

"With nobody! Woe to any of our people who may chance to be captured by his warriors. Their fate is sealed."

"Humph!" said Frank, grimly.

Harkoona ordered the gates of the city open, and the Americans were bidden a warm welcome. As the Fakir entered the walled town, the people cheered and ran alongside.

Frank was glad to make friends with the Rajpoots, for he was not sure but that he might need their co-operation in a possible attack upon the Yellow Khan. Soma was a warm friend, he knew.

Prince Harkoona urged his visitors to remain to a fete to be held in their honor. But Frank would not do this.

He was anxious to push forward on his journey. So after a brief stay in the Rajpoot city, the Fakir started for the notch in the mountain wall.

The Rajpoots gave them accurate description of the route to the Khan's country. Then the Fakir proceeded on its way.

Leaving Harkoona's city, Frank sent the Fakir bowling over the up grade into the notch. Here travel was necessarily slow.

They were obliged to pick their way through rocky ravines and over stony ground, along the edge of precipices and across mountain streams. But they gradually mounted into the notch.

It was a mighty view to the southward which they obtained. Words are hardly adequate to describe it.

As they ascended the atmosphere grew cooler and more easy to bear. Soon they were in the great deciduous forests which crowned both sides of the notch. But a wide path had been cut through this.

The Fakir had actually got well up into the notch when night came on.

Frank was anxious to clear the divide, so he kept on as long as he could.

But after a time, in spite of the powerful rays of the searchlight, it was considered safer to halt for the night. Consequently the machine was brought to a stop.

This was beside a tremendous high waterfall—a sheet of water descending a perpendicular height from the sheer mountain wall like a ribbon of silver. It fell with a strong force into a rocky basin.

Beside this the Fakir was halted. To all appearance the region was the most wild and uninhabited of any they had yet passed through.

As there was apparently no danger from lurking foes here, the voyagers descended and built a huge camp-fire beside the basin. At this altitude the air was really chilly.

Pomp prepared an appetizing evening meal, and then he and Barney swung hammocks under the trees, and enjoyed a siesta in the circle of fire light, with the roar of the cataract in their ears.

But as they reclined there they had not a fancy that any human being, much less a foe, was near them. They were chatting briskly when suddenly Barney gave a gasp and a grunt and started up.

His face was pale. Pomp gazed at him in amazement.

"Wha' am de mattah, I'ish?" he asked.

The Celt pointed to the shadows across the basin.

"Howly murder!" he gasped, "do yez see that? It's a banshee or me name is not Barney O'Shea!"

"Huh! wha's dat? Golly!"

Pomp's wool stood on end as well. He crawled out of his hammock. The cause of this excitement was made very obvious.

Across the basin and in the edge of the black shadows a white ghostly figure had appeared to view.

It stood there like a statue for a few moments and then began to move along the verge of the basin. To Barney and Pomp it could be nothing more nor less than a ghost.

For some moments the two jokers watched it. Then Barney whispered:

"Shure, we'd better get out at this, naygur. I don't want no part av ghosts in mine!"

"Yo' am right, I'ish!" agreed the darky; "we bettah call Marse Frank."

But they were spared this trouble, for at this moment Frank came up. He had also caught sight of the white figure.

He was as much astonished as Barney and Pomp, but of course did not connect the apparition with anything supernatural.

"We will find out," he said, as he started for the edge of the basin. Barney and Pomp were terrified.

"Fo' de lan' ob goodness, Marse Frank," cried the coon, "don' go ober dere. If yo' does de ghosts git yo' fo' suah!"

"Don't yez do it, sor!" screamed Barney; "shure, it's comin' this way now, bad cess to it."

Frank laughed as the two terror-stricken jokers scampered back to the Fakir. He advanced still nearer to the pool.

Then he beheld a startling sight. From behind the sheet of falling water other robed figures glided into view. Something like a comprehension of the affair then dawned upon Frank.

He could see that it was more than likely that a band of Hindoo devotees had managed to get behind the fall of water, perhaps a cavern existed there, and they came to this spot for worship. Their white robes attested this.

In fact the theory was proved when suddenly they were seen to fall upon their knees and break into a chant. They did not seem to heed the Fakir or our adventurers.

Frank watched them curiously for some moments. Then he advanced to the edge of the waterfall.

A glance showed him a space of fully five feet between the water and the face of the cliff. This was certainly sufficient to enable the Hindoos to pass.

He even edged his way through the fine spray until he saw the mouth of a small cavern. This explained all.

Returning to the Fakir, Frank explained all to Barney and Pomp, which somewhat allayed their fears. But they did not return to the hammocks.

Neither did the Hindoo worshipers trouble the Americans. The night passed without incident.

When morning came the Fakir once more got under way. Up the defile it climbed until a short while later the divide was crossed.

They began to go down now very rapidly. For a time the forest obstructed their view.

But after some miles the foliage broke and they looked down at last upon the country of the Yellow Khan.

And the scene upon which they gazed was a striking one. Even the natural growth of the long valley, the mountain sides, and even the air seemed blended in a yellow tinge.

But far up the valley upon the banks of a winding river was a large city. Its domes and minarets could be plainly seen, and they flashed back the rays of the sun with gilded gleam.

It was plain that this was the wonderful City of Gold, the famous home of the wealthy Yellow Khan. The great province extending in every direction was thickly settled.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE KHAN'S COUNTRY.

It can be imagined that our voyagers gazed upon the spectacle before them with much interest.

They had traveled many thousand miles to see the city of the Yellow Khan. Success had crowned their efforts.

But Frank was assured of one thing. It was not going to be at all an easy matter to get upon good terms with this mighty ruler.

To be sure, the Fakir could have descended upon the Yellow City and given the walls a battering, and perhaps made the Khan pay heavy tribute.

But conquest was not Frank's aspiration nor his purpose.

His desire was to affiliate with the barbaric ruler and study the characteristics of these strange people. To accomplish this was his end.

How he was to do it was a puzzle.

There was no doubt but that the Khan would repulse his advances.

But Frank was resolved to make friendly overtures at all events. The Fakir now began to slide down into the valley rapidly.

A few hours later the low lands were reached, and the first habitation was encountered.

This was a stone house made after the Hindoo fashion, with a bamboo porch and thatched roof.

As the machine drew near, from the interior a number of natives came out. They gave one glance at the Fakir and then set up a hostile shout.

Back into the dwelling they went, and without the least warning a volley of bullets came rattling against the sides of the Fakir. This angered Frank more than words can tell.

For a moment he was half tempted to turn the electric gun against the house. One bomb would have blown it to atoms.

But he did not, and affected to pay no heed to the uncivil salutation. The Fakir passed on into a road which led down the valley.

Every habitation had gardens and fields of waving grain. There was every sign of abundance and prosperity.

It was evident that famine did not visit the valley of the Yellow Khan. The soil was peculiarly rich, and the people probably thrifty and hard working.

But at every turn the Fakir received a hostile front. As the machine went on the Hindoos began to form in behind it and pursued, firing from behind walls and hedges.

Barney and Pomp were intensely desirous of returning the fire. But Frank would not allow them to do this.

"Only in case of dire necessity," he said; "it is better for us not to retaliate until then!"

A great mob was now pursuing the machine. Really, affairs began to look serious.

It really seemed as if the Fakir was deliberately rushing down into the maws of a trap. Of course the adventurers had a great engine of defense in the dynamite gun.

But on the other hand, such a mighty body of Hindoos might devise some method of destruction. Again, there was no certainty that the Yellow Khan did not possess heavy cannon.

The machine of course could do nothing against cannon balls. One of them rightly aimed may demolish the vehicle.

So there was need to proceed with great caution. But soon the Fakir reached a long level plain, and over this it raced at full speed.

The pursuers were distanced. The city Frank reckoned to be a dozen miles distant. This could be covered in less than an hour, allowing for any obstacles or rough ground.

But now the plantations became thicker, and Hindoos seemed to swarm from everywhere. No matter in what direction our adventurers looked bands of them could be seen.

The whole country was aroused. In fact bells and gongs were heard in the distant city.

It was evident that the Hindoos meant to make a lively defense, for to them it was probably an assured fact that these new-comers were invaders and foes.

The hour had not elapsed when the Fakir rolled down upon a plain leading to the city walls.

The gates were closed, and great crowds of armed men were on the walls.

Frank halted at what he considered a safe distance.

Then he began to study the City of Gold with his most powerful glass. He was deeply impressed with what he saw.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "there is no other city in India like this. It is like a fabled city from old legend!"

"Begorra, it's as big as Dublin, I'll take me oath!" answered Barney.

Frank saw that the Golden City covered a vast area, and that the number of inhabitants could not be estimated at less than one hundred thousand.

Doubtless the province held as many more, which made it very strong. But the marvelous beauty of the city was the main point.

The buildings were all of a pure white stone like marble.

This was polished like a mirror and glistened in the sunlight. The roofs and domes were gilded, and this combination of white and gold was beyond conception.

The buildings were not high and were rambling. But the avenues were broad and carpeted with green grass, while the green foliage of the tropical trees which lined the streets, or filled the gardens, lent color to the bewildering scene.

Some of the buildings had roof gardens decked with the most beautiful of flowering plants. Altogether, Frank Reade, Jr., knew of no city on earth akin to it.

"On my word!" he declared, "it is like one's conception of the Celestial City!"

Certainly the Yellow Khan was a ruler of wealth to be able to keep his city up in such a shape. On the whole, perhaps his aggressive spirit might be necessary to this end.

It could be readily understood with what rapacious avidity the lawless tribes of the south would pillage this rich province.

One stone would hardly be left upon another. On the whole there might be method in the Khan's madness.

And this theory made Frank all the more desirous of avoiding personal conflict with these people.

If he could only succeed in convincing the Khan that his purpose was friendly, that he was an alien and had no interest in making warfare upon him, the Khan might be tamed.

But he was prone to admit already that this was a difficult task.

"By Jove!" he muttered; "I wish I could have five minutes' conversation with the Yellow Khan. Ah, what is that?"

Upon the walls of the city there had suddenly appeared a striking personage.

He was a powerful framed man, and was dressed in a complete armor of glittering yellow—gold undoubtedly.

He carried a great trumpet, which shone brilliantly in the sun. Through this he shouted a long command in Hindoo. Frank shook his head.

"That don't count," he said, "for I don't know the language. I wish he would talk English."

Frank, by way of reply to the golden messenger's proclamation, displayed a white flag, and even showed himself on the main deck with hands uplifted.

Whether they understood this signal of amity or not Frank could not say, but they did not answer it. The golden herald disappeared.

Then affairs took a new and startling turn.

Suddenly the city gate swung open, and out dashed a battery of two guns.

Frank gave an exclamation of dismay. He saw that they were regular field pieces, and that if a shell or solid shot should strike the Fakir all would be up.

A squad of well trained gunners were with the pieces. The horses brought them out at a full gallop.

Straight toward the machine they galloped. Suddenly they halted on a little eminence. The horses and caissons fell back to the rear.

The guns were unlimbered almost before Frank recovered himself. Then a shell burst twenty yards short of the Fakir.

"Bejabers, Mister Frank!" cried Barney, "they're after gettin' a line on us! Had we not better change a bit?"

"As sure as you live!" cried Frank as he sprang to the motor lever. He ran the machine out of range.

Then a sore temptation beset him. It would have been an easy matter to have ended the fight in his favor.

He had but to throw a dynamite bomb at the feet of the gunners. The battery would be no more.

As it was they could be seen limbering up the guns and coming again in pursuit. Once more they came within range.

Again Frank distanced them with the Fakir. But they still kept up the pursuit.

Frank set a course around the city. As fast as the battery came up he simply moved out of range. This might have puzzled the pursuers had they not fancied that it was all because of fear.

Had they known of the real power of the deadly dynamite gun their courage might not have been so great.

Frank went to the last extreme to avoid a conflict. But at length it became impossible to longer guard against it.

The Golden City lay upon the banks of a wide river. The Fakir came to the banks of this.

These were too steep for it to descend, and Frank saw that they were cornered. No matter what direction they would take the river bent in such a way that the Fakir would be at the mercy of the battery.

Frank saw that the crisis had come. It was useless to attempt to avert it. But now that it had come he was not the one to shrink.

The two guns were thundering nearer. The gunners realized that they had the foe entrapped.

There was no help for the Fakir save in the silencing of these guns. It was a question of self-preservation.

"May your destruction be upon your own heads," muttered Frank, as he sprang to the dynamite gun.

The battery was not two hundred yards away. It had come to a stand, and the guns were unlimbering. One shot might wreck the Fakir.

No time was to be lost.

Frank thrust a bomb into the breech. Then he sighted the gun. He aimed for a point in the ground just between the two cannons.

One moment he ran his eye over the sight. Then he drew a deep breath and prepared to fire. The next moment he pressed the deadly button.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REFUGEE.

THE dynamite gun gave a recoil and a sharp hiss. The next instant there was a shock like that of an earthquake.

The bomb had struck fairly between the two guns.

The result can hardly be described. The guns themselves were shotted, and as the bomb exploded it also exploded them.

They were hurled from their carriages many yards away. As for the gunners not one escaped of those at the guns.

A mighty cavity was blown in the sandy soil. The startled horses ran away with the caissons.

The Yellow Khan's battery was utterly destroyed, and all in a breath. The immense throng which witnessed from the walls of the city could hardly realize it.

It must have been an astounding surprise to them, for a few moments before the battery had been having its own way. Frank regretted the necessity of his action exceedingly much.

"But it was a question of self preservation," he declared; "it was their lives or ours!"

"Bad cess to him!" declared Barney; "it's no more than they deserved!"

"Golly! I don't fink dat dey kin undahstan' wha' a fink dis 'lectric gun ob ours is," said Pomp.

"They have a faint idea now," said Frank.

"Begorra, I hope it will be a bit av a lesson to him," said Barney.

For a time the Hindoos seemed completely taken aback by the catastrophe. Whether they had another battery or not could not be guessed.

But if they had it did not appear. For a time they made no further move against the Fakir.

Frank took advantage of this to run down near the city walls and once again show the white flag. But the Hindoos, if they knew what it meant, did not heed it.

They made no friendly overture either, which was aggravating to Frank Reade, Jr. The young inventor was really exasperated.

"On my word," he declared, angrily, "I feel just like battering down their walls for them, and making them yield a bit of respect."

"Bejabers, it's the only thing that will bring them to terms," cried Barney. "Make them show respect to the American flag."

"If I thought they would know what it meant, I would," declared Frank.

But at this moment the new move of the Hindoos became apparent. From the city gates there rushed forth a line of uniformed men. These carried ladders; behind them came armed soldiers.

The ladder men spread out as if to surround the Fakir. Their purpose was evidently to place the ladders against the Fakir while the armed men clambered aboard.

But they had not reckoned on several small matters.

It had probably not occurred to them that to put salt on a bird's tail you must first catch him. What would the Fakir be doing all this while?

But they were certainly earnest and sincere in their purpose. On they came in legions.

Frank started the machine at an oblique angle to the south, and then changed to a backward course. He dodged the attacking party easily.

There was plenty of room in the vicinity, and the dodging game could be kept up indefinitely.

Frank followed out this programme until the Hindoos were ready to drop with exhaustion.

And yet the exasperating machine kept just out of their reach. They were furious but impatient.

There is a limit to human endurance, and finally the game of tag, for such it was, had to be abandoned. Again the Hindoos were defeated.

What the emotions of the Yellow Khan were could only be guessed. But it was judged that he must be a very angry man.

He had lost his battery and his best gunners. The elusive Fakir was yet before his city walls.

Moreover, it possessed a gun the most deadly destructive ever seen or known in that part of the world. All these things were dismaying.

But the Khan was evidently not a whit discouraged or taken aback. He made no show whatever of treating with the invaders. He yet showed his fangs like a maddened wolf.

In vain Frank showed the white flag and tried to make peaceful overtures. They were not heeded.

Frank was now sorely puzzled what course to pursue. The day was drawing to a close and nothing had been gained in the attempt to bring the Khan to terms.

Of course Frank had used no very vigorous method. He was determined not to do this until later.

Darkness was fast shutting down so Frank moved the machine to a commanding eminence and here prepared to spend the night.

The Hindoos seemed to have abandoned the battle for the night. But a great hubbub could be heard in the city.

Great fires blazed upon the walls and it was evident that they meant to be prepared for an attack. Barney turned the search-light upon the Golden City when it became dark enough.

The effect was thrilling and beautiful in the extreme. The fires of the public places looked dull and yellow compared with the white glare.

For hours our voyagers sat out on the upper deck, smoked their cigars, and enjoyed the balmy air and enlivening scene. It was near midnight, when suddenly Barney clutched Frank's arm.

"Mither av Moses!" he muttered; "phwativer is that?"

"What?" asked the young inventor.

"Wud yez look down yonder ferninst that pile av sthones?"

Frank screened his eyes and gazed in the direction indicated. Certainly in the shadow there was a dark form which was moving about strangely.

"Begorra," muttered Barney, "I'll soon fix the spalpeen!"

He picked up his rifle; but Frank said instantly:

"No—don't fire!"

"Phwy not, sir?"

"It may not be a foe."

In that dim light Frank could see that the form of a man standing there was making gesticulations with his arms.

The next moment he advanced into the circle of electric light and toward the Fakir.

Frank was interested.

"Look out, sor!" cautioned Barney, "it may be a thrick!"

"We'll see!" muttered the young inventor, grimly. Then he advanced to the rail and called:

"Ho there! Who are you? Speak or we will fire!"

The unknown threw himself flat on the ground and replied in good English:

"I am an Englishman like yourselves. For the love of Heaven, take me aboard with you. I will explain all!"

"Come along!" cried Frank, readily; "how in the world did you get into this part of the country?"

The next moment up to the side of the Fakir came a man, whose skin was as dark as that of the Hindoos, but whose features betrayed that he was as he said, an Englishman or Huzaar.

He was intensely pale and excited, and looked about him with curiosity and vague doubt.

"Am I dreaming or is this the truth?" he gasped; "is it possible that I am once more in the company of my own kind. What wonderful traveling coach is this that you have? Ah, can it be true?"

"What you see is true," declared Frank; "but you can understand that we are somewhat curious to know who and what you are."

"Who am I?" said the refugee, with a shiver. "Ah, for the last eight years I have been a slave in that accursed city of white and gold. I am the only white man I reckon whom these pirates have ever suffered to pass in and out of those gates alive."

"I was captured in a strange way. I was one of a prospecting party from Delhi. We got into these mountains and made a rich find. But before we could get out with our gold the fiends descended upon us and I was the only survivor. What prompted them to spare my life I know not, but I was brought down here and made a slave of."

"There is great excitement beyond those walls just now. They are not sure what the hated Huzaars will do next. I managed to scale the wall and get out here. I felt sure that if I could reach you that you would give me aid to reach home and friends again."

"My name is Samuel Barton, and my home is in Kent, England. I throw myself upon your mercy!"

Frank held out his hand.

"My good man," he cried, "you are more than welcome here! Of course we will give you all the aid in our power!"

"God bless you!" cried Barton, with much emotion.

"Were you the only white man enslaved in that city?"

"I was," replied Barton. "Ah, I cannot tell you all I have suffered in the last eight years! But, pardon me. May I ask how you chanced to come into this barbarous region?"

"Certainly," replied Frank; "we are here for exploration and adventure. We are not Englishmen as you supposed."

"Ah!" exclaimed Barton, in surprise.

"No; we are Americans. My name is Frank Reade, Jr., and these are Barney and Pomp, my good friends."

The refugee bowed low, and said:

"This is all very surprising to me. But then, only an American could have invented and perfected such a remarkable traveling coach. Is steam the motive power?"

"No," replied Frank, "it is electricity. But let me show you some of the peculiarities of the Fakir."

"I shall be glad!" said Barton.

Frank proceeded to show the refugee the various mechanical parts of the Fakir. He was so intensely interested that he forgot his fatigue and exhaustion.

"It is wonderful," he cried. "And it is with that electric gun that you destroyed the Khan's battery?"

"I did!" replied Frank.

"By Jove! if you had the greed of a Cortez now, here would be a chance for you. For you could conquer this whole city, and I promise you that there is wealth enough in it to buy a European kingdom. Why, some of these natives eat their porridge from plates of solid gold. The Yellow Khan rolls in gold and precious stones. His private mines in these mountains must be the richest on earth."

Frank smiled, and replied:

"But my purpose is not of conquest. I want to learn all that I can about this Yellow Khan. You shall tell me all about him."

CHAPTER VIII.

A TREATY.

"THAT I will," replied Barton readily; "and it will sound to you like a story of the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"But not to-night," said Frank generously; "you are much exhausted. Pomp will give you some food and wine, and to-morrow you shall tell me all."

Barton was overwhelmed.

"Ah, you are indeed kind!" he cried. "I may be able to repay you. Food and sleep will give me back my strength, and then I will help you fight these barbarians to the death."

Pomp set forth a goodly repast for the refugee. He ate it with avidity, and then turned in. His sleep that night was sound.

The Hindoos made no attempt to attack the machine that night. In fact, they were wholly at a loss to know how they were to be rid of their unconquerable foe.

The truth was, there was something almost like a panic in the City of Gold. For once the Yellow Khan was at his wit's end for a device to get rid of a troublesome visitor.

When the sun burst once more upon the gilded roofs of the Khan's city, it revealed a state of turbulent unrest and anxiety.

But this was not the case aboard the Fakir.

Barton came on deck greatly refreshed, and dressed in one of Frank Reade, Jr.'s suits.

"I can hardly realize," he said, with tears welling from his eyes, "that I have at last escaped from that awful captivity; this is a happy hour for me!"

"Then you think it is quite impossible to make peace with the Khan?" asked Frank.

Barton nodded.

"I do not believe you can treat successfully with him," he said; "in my opinion the only way to bring him to terms is to show him that you can and will destroy his city."

"You speak the Hindoo tongue?" asked Frank.

"I do."

"That is good. Perhaps you would kindly act as interpreter in case the necessity arose?"

"Certainly I would."

Barton now described the Khan's palace and his mode of living. It was like a story from ancient legends.

The Khan was possessed of fully three hundred wives—the flower of his kingdom.

His royal stables were filled with blooded horses, fine camels and trained elephants.

He was himself surrounded by a guard of the best fighting men in India. His treasure vaults were filled with gold and silver.

In appearance the Khan was a most imposing man. He was taller than the average Hindoo, and of a more yellow complexion. He claimed to be a Son of the Yellow Sun, but tradition asserted that he was a native of far Mongolia, and not in any respect a Hindoo.

However this was, he was a ruler in every sense of the term—a powerful despot and a tyrant. Many a poor wretch had lost his head for the slightest question of the Khan's orders.

That people liked their yellow king was hardly likely. No tyrant is ever beloved by their subjects. Osro, the Yellow Khan, ruled by fear, and consequently, in many cases, won the hatred of those whom he oppressed.

"Despots are capricious," said Barton, "but I have never seen a despot to compare with Yellow Osro."

"But in time he must come to terms with some other race," said Frank. "India is opening up and the people will have to open intercourse with neighboring tribes or run the risk of conquest."

"That will be the fate of this kingdom," said Barton. "You will see that with the passing away of the Yellow Khan, this treasure valley will fall into the hands of those who will work it for the rest of the world. There is no other such El Dorado on earth."

There was certainly logic in Barton's words, and Frank did not dispute it. But at this moment a new move was made by the Hindoos.

On the wall of the city appeared the same trumpeter or herald, who had appeared the day before.

He again made a loud proclamation which Frank could not understand. But there was one on board now who did.

Barton listened eagerly and said:

"He announces that the Kahn is willing to pay you a sum in gold to leave this valley and never return."

"Reply to him," said Frank. "And tell him that we do not seek to do harm in his domains. Our visit is a friendly one, and we beg the honor of his acquaintance and entertainment. We will visit him at his palace, if he wishes, and pay him our respects. Then we will go peacefully on our way and leave him to his own devices."

Barton communicated this to the herald. The latter disappeared, no doubt to carry the word to the Khan.

"No use!" said the Englishman, shaking his head; "the Yellow Khan will not accede to such terms."

"Well," said Frank, "of course, if we must pass him by, we will. I do not intend to force him to come to terms of friendship. Such a thing would be farcial and wrong. If he positively refuses to treat with us, we will take a look over the valley and then strike for Central Asia and the Steppes."

Some time elapsed before the herald appeared again. Then it was Barton's turn to be surprised.

The herald proclaimed:

"His noble and exalted majesty the Khan sends greeting and accepts the friendly terms of the Huzaars. They may enter the city by the nearest gate at high noon, and Osro, Dust of the Feet of the Most High, will receive them at his palace."

Literally translated by Barton this was the message returned by the Khan. Frank at once made a ceremonious reply. Then he turned to Barton, and said triumphantly:

"What did I tell you? We have won. He has come to my terms. The Yellow Khan is not unapproachable."

Barton was very pale.

"It is an unusual thing," he said; "he never did such a thing before. There is something wrong. Look out for treachery."

"Pshaw!"

"Well, mark my word. Again it will not be safe for me to go with you."

"Not safe?" ejaculated Frank.

"No!"

"And why not, pray?"

"They will recognize me and demand that you give me up as a slave. However, I can secrete myself out here and wait for your return."

Frank was dismayed.

"I don't like that," he said. "We shall have no interpreter."

"I am sorry," replied Barton; "but it will certainly mean death to me."

"It seems to me that you might as well remain in hiding on board the Fakir," said Frank. "Ah, I have it!"

"What?"

"You shall wear a disguise. With a beard and different clothes they would never know you."

"I never thought of that," muttered Barton; "it is a good scheme, and I believe it would work. The Khan would not know me, for it is doubtful if he ever saw me."

So the matter was settled. No time was lost in getting ready for the meeting with the Khan. Frank had everything made ship-shape aboard the Fakir.

At the appointed hour of noon the machine ran down to the city gate. A row of gayly uniformed guards was there stationed.

As the Fakir ran through the gate they saluted, and once within the gate a mounted guard awaited and rode in advance to lead the way.

The street was lined with the Hindoo soldiers, and Frank was surprised at the size and efficiency of the Khan's army. The people crowded the house tops and windows.

It was a remarkable scene to gaze upon, and it made due impression upon the adventurers. Truly this reception by the Yellow Khan well repaid them for the trip.

Gypsy bands played gayly and the scene was an enlivening one. Greater honor could scarce be done any visitors.

Frank and Barton stood on the forward platform, the latter very cleverly disguised. Barney and Pomp were in the pilot house.

Through the main street of the Khan's City rolled the Fakir. Soon the great palace was seen just ahead.

This was a remarkable edifice. Built of the polished white stone, it was lined and corniced with gilt. There were many streamers and flags displayed from its many balconies.

And a great entrance was seen just ahead, on either side of which a line of gilt uniformed guards were placed. Through this entrance the Fakir was directed.

And once beyond the great arch, a wonderful scene was presented.

They were in a mammoth courtyard with great balconies about it, in which were hundreds of beautiful Hindoo ladies and gilt uniformed men. But just opposite the entrance was a great dais and canopy of rich cloth of gold.

Beneath this sat the remarkable man known as the Yellow Khan. One glance at him was sufficient to bear out this assertion.

He was a man of large frame and commanding appearance. His features were bold but not unhandsome, though the cut of his mouth impressed one that he might be cruel.

His complexion was more yellow than that of the average Mongolian, yet it seemed no indication of unhealth. His eyes were keen and bright, and his general appearance king-like in the extreme.

The Fakir came to a halt in the center of the courtyard. A number of attendants ran forward and laid a long roll of gilt cloth for the visitors to walk upon. Frank and Barton descended from the deck.

It was not unlikely that the latter was much ill at ease. But he was careful not to show it.

Two gilded pages led the way to the foot of the throne and fell upon their faces. The two visitors made a low obeisance.

Then the Khan spoke to one of his noblemen who stood by him, and this fellow acted as spokesman.

"The Khan has bidden me to say that you are welcome to his city," said he.

Barton made a low bow and communicated this to Frank. Then he answered:

"The great Yankee traveler from the lands of the far West yields his best wishes to the Khan, and thanks him for his ceremony and hospitality."

This declaration seemed to puzzle and interest the Khan.

"The Khan never before heard of the people called Yankee," was the next word. "Are you not Huzaars?"

"We are not Englishmen," replied Barton, "but Yankees from the far land of America."

The Khan pondered a moment. Then his yellow face lit up.

"Ah, yes!" was the reply; "I have heard of the strange country called America. Did you come from there with your horseless chariot?"

"The Khan has a large sum of gold which he will give the Yankees for their horseless chariot."

This was an awkward request. For a moment Frank's diplomacy failed. Then a thought came to him.

"It is contrary to the laws for the Yankee sahib to sell his chariot," replied Barton; "but he will be glad to give the Khan a ride in it."

This, however, did not suit the Khan. He frowned and spoke sharp words to his spokesman. The next query was a blunt one.

"Why did the Yankees fire upon and destroy the two cannon belonging to the Khan?"

Frank's reply was sharp and dignified.

"For the fact that the gunners were firing at the Yankees and meant to destroy them."

"The Yankees were intruding upon the Khan's own land!" was the excuse.

"They came to pay a friendly visit, but were received like foes," was Frank's reply; "the Yankees regret the affair, but it was in self-defense!"

At this juncture Frank grew ill at ease, and whispered to Barton:

"Do you think there is any possibility of treachery here?"

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders.

"We had better keep our eyes open," he whispered, in reply.

Frank's eyes flashed.

It angered him to think that the Khan could plan and execute anything so treacherous as decoying the travelers into the city for the purpose of capturing them. This was not yet proven, but if such a thing was attempted, Frank assured himself that he would blow the Khan and his palace to perdition.

In a few moments the Khan's spokesman again came forward.

"The Khan announces that it is his pleasure that the Yankees shall sell their chariot to him."

Barton made reply:

"The Yankee traveler respectfully makes reply to the Most High Khan that he cannot comply with his request."

This reply, courteous though it was, inflamed the Khan, and he partly rose from his throne and shook his jeweled scimeter. Again the spokesman said:

"The Khan declares that the Yankee must sell his chariot, or it shall become his under the law which forbids any but a Hindoo to enter the Khan's city."

Frank saw in an instant that matters had reached a crisis. There was no other way but to temporize.

They were at the moment in a critical position. Should they attempt retreat precipitately to the Fakir, an order from the Khan might cut them down.

So the young inventor pretended to yield.

"As it is the Khan's pleasure," said Barton, "the Yankee traveler will communicate with his fellow travelers and send word immediately back of their decision."

At first this reply seemed to please the dignitary, for it seemed to him that the travelers were yielding. He nodded his head cheerfully, and Frank and Barton started back toward the Fakir.

But a sudden thought must have come to the Khan, for they had not taken two steps when up he sprang with a sharp cry.

Instantly two janizaries with drawn scimeters sprang in front of Frank and Barton. They flashed the blades before the adventurers.

For a moment Frank thought all was lost.

But at that moment he glanced up at the pilot house window. He saw Barney and Pomp there with rifles ready to use.

That the two swordsmen had orders to finish Frank and Barton there was no doubt. One made a vicious blow at Frank.

Had it struck the young inventor it would have cut him in two. But he dodged it by the best of luck. At the same moment he made a signal to Barney and Pomp.

Crack-ack!

The two rifles spoke just in time. Barton would have been hewn to pieces in a moment but for that.

Frank clutched his arm and sprang for the steps. The two janizaries had fallen dead.

"Quick!" cried Frank. "Our lives depend upon it!"

What followed baffles description.

Bullets whistled past the two white men. But they gained the cabin of the Fakir.

The whole court-yard surged with armed men, obeying the Khan's orders to seize the Fakir and butcher the travelers.

Frank was never so mad in his life. If there was anything on earth he abhorred it was treachery.

The Khan had proved himself a most dishonorable wretch. No fate could be too bad for him.

The young inventor felt justified in destroying him and his city. It would be just retaliation.

"I'll give him a good lesson!" he muttered. "Are the doors tight, Barney?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Give it to the wretches with your Winchesters then! Clear a way out of this place and then we'll teach them a lesson!"

It was a terribly exciting moment.

Frank sprang to the keyboard and swung the Fakir around. In doing so he crushed into a great throng of Hindoos.

For a moment it seemed as if progress was barred.

The Khan's soldiers fought like demons. They sprang over the rail and tried to batter down the windows and doors. They even clutched at the wheels to hold the vehicle stationary.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KHAN'S TREACHERY.

BARTON made reply that they had come all the way from America across the great waters to see the Yellow Khan and pay respects to him.

This seemed to flatter the yellow ruler. He had heard of the great seas, but had never seen them. His next declaration was a startling one.

But the engines were too powerful. Frank pressed on a spring which threw out the keen knives on the hubs. These cut the wretches down like wheat under the sickle.

Forward dashed the machine. Frank's purpose was to get outside where he could use the electric gun without any danger of the building falling on him.

Into the narrow passage the Fakir forced its way. The Hindoos, yelling furiously and firing volleys at the machine, could not seem to stay it.

Through the passage it crushed its way. Now it was in the open square. The supreme moment had come.

In his rage at his maltreatment Frank could have annihilated the whole gang of them. He sprung to the electric gun.

He signaled out the soldiers in the mob and fired a bomb amongst them. In an instant a space was cleared about the Fakir.

"Now, my treacherous friend!" cried Frank; "down comes your house about your ears!"

He turned the gun full at the beautiful palace. For one instant only did he feel compunction.

Then he acted.

Straight at the great dome he sent a bomb. It struck it full and fair.

If an earthquake had shaken the building greater damage could not have been done.

A great hole was blown in the gilded roof and down came a section of the dome, while the entire structure was shaken.

Out of the windows and doors and down from balconies poured the people. Whether the Khan was among them or not could only be guessed.

Frank had no desire of making human slaughter; so he waited until a large part of the people were out of the structure.

Then he drove another bomb at the dome. This time it fell down through the roof with a crash. Another bomb at the portico blew that down in a heap.

The palace covered fully two acres of ground, but Frank kept hurling the bombs at it until it, with all its Oriental furnishings, was but a heap of ruins.

The Hindoos, appalled at such deadly work, fled from the vicinity. They congregated on the city walls about, and were praying to Brahma devoutly that the terrible Yankees would not destroy the whole city.

What had become of the Khan it was not easy to say. That he must have realized that he had caught a Tartar goes without saying.

Frank, however, did not carry out his plan of retaliation further. He was content with having destroyed the Khan's palace. Now he could afford to await events.

Barton was amazed at the awful power of the dynamite gun.

"Why, there is no battery of guns on earth that could be compared with it," he said. "It would whip the strongest army in the twinkling of an eye."

"Well," said Frank, with conviction, "it would require plucky and a strong body of men to stand up before it. I do not fear a much larger army than the Khan's so long as they do not have artillery."

"What will you do now?" asked Barton. "Shall we say adieu to the Khan?"

"By no means," said Frank stubbornly. "I mean to bring his highness to a state of submission first. I will give him a good tanning."

"You are no doubt justified," agreed Barton; "but will there be much satisfaction in that?"

"Yes!" cried Frank resolutely. "He is a despot and a barbarian. It will do me good to humble him."

"You have already done that."

"Ah, but he has not had enough!"

And Frank stuck to his resolve. He kept the Fakir on the spot by the ruined palace while the shades of night began to fall.

The search-light's glare lit up the ruins. Yet the Hindoos kept their distance, nor ventured near the feared Fakir.

It was hard to imagine what must have been the Kahn's state of mind. He had certainly been punished most terribly for his treachery.

That he had deserved the punishment there was no manner of doubt.

It was a scurvy trick which he had tried to play.

To entice the travelers into the city on pretensions of friendship, and then to try and destroy them was the very meanest kind of a game.

"We will see!" muttered Frank, who now thoroughly despised the Hindoo despot. "Osro, the Yellow Khan, will find that when he tackles the Yankees and tries his cut-throat games on them, he has struck the wrong sort of people. I have not done with him yet!"

CHAPTER X.

THE EXPLOSION.

THE night seemed interminable in length, yet it was not wholly devoid of interest.

The Hindoos gathered upon the city walls and distant house tops and chanted weirdly in an invocation to their gods to destroy their dreaded foe.

The priests built great bonfires, and in one locality our adventurers became assured that they were offering up human sacrifices.

This was revolting and horrible. But the night finally passed and the sun once more appeared.

Just before dawn the people had grown very quiet. Perhaps the Khan was coming to his senses.

This seemed a literal fact when a white robed emissary appeared in the square before the Fakir with a white flag and gestures of amity.

As he drew near, Barton hailed him.

"Well, sahib!" he cried. "What message do you bring?"

"I come from the Great Khan!" was the reply; "he sends greeting and wishes to meet his brothers from beyond the great waters again, in peace and friendship!"

"Go back and tell him," said Barton, as dictated by Frank, "that if he means that, to come down here into this square with his own bodyguard, no more, and we will talk!"

The emissary departed.

In a very short time the jingling music of a Hindoo band was heard, and then a cavalcade was seen.

In the middle of it rode the Kahn. He was mounted upon a high stepping horse, led by two armed men.

When within speaking distance the Kahn's party halted. The Hindoo ruler looked weary and worn, if not actually frightened as he rode forward.

His emissary shouted:

"The Kahn begs that the terrible Yankee with his mighty gun will depart from this country and never return. He does not ask his friendship or his hate!"

"That is a reasonable request," replied Frank. "And the Yankee traveler will comply with it, if the Yellow Kahn will apologize for his treacherous game of yesterday."

In response to this the Kahn made a very humble apology, and requested the Yankee traveler to depart by the north gate. To this Frank agreed.

"The north gate," he muttered. "That must be straight up this main street. Well, we have done with the Yellow Khan. Now for the Steppes, a slide through Europe, and home."

"Good!" cried Barton. "I shall be glad to see dear old England!"

The Fakir moved away down the main street toward the north gate. The street was deserted.

As the machine drew near the gate Frank saw that it was wide open and not a soul near it.

As the Fakir ran toward it there was in Frank's mind just the faintest suspicion that all was not right; but yet he never dreamed of treachery again so soon.

But the Fakir had just reached the gate when Barton saw a flash of fire at the left.

He instantly gave a shout as he recognized it.

"A fuse!" he cried; "forward, quickly, or we will be blown into eternity."

Too late!

There was a stunning shock, a roar and crash, and the Fakir was lifted and dashed against the arch of the gateway. It seemed as if everything about was going to destruction.

It was a treacherous and unexpected game of the Khan to destroy the machine. A mine of gunpowder had been laid under the gateway.

But for some reason it was not altogether a success. The stone pavement had been hurled upward, and the pillars of the gateway were shattered.

But the Fakir did not get the full force of the explosion fortunately. There was sufficient shock, however, to throw the machine upon its side in the gateway.

Everyone on board was for a few moments stunned and unable to act; when they recovered they picked themselves up from various corners. Frank Reade, Jr., was the first to act.

He crawled out of the cabin door and took a quick look about. He saw how affairs stood at once.

Instantly he shouted loudly:

"Barney and Pomp, come quick! All depends upon getting this vehicle righted."

Frank dropped down to the shattered pavement. Smoke in dense clouds was all about.

But the young inventor knew there was no time to lose. The Hindoos would be on the spot as quickly as that smoke cleared.

Barney and Pomp heard the call, and it is needless to say that they were quick to answer. Barton also followed them.

"Heah I is, Marse Frank!" shouted the coon. "Yo' say de wo'd wha' we mus' do!"

"Catch hold here, all of you, and right the machine!" cried Frank. "Lively now!"

All took hold of the running gear of the Fakir. It was no light matter to place that heavy vehicle again upon its level. But the voyagers were desperate and lifted like heroes.

Up, up went the Fakir. One tremendous strain and over she went, right side up.

The smoke had lifted and a hubbub of voices was heard up the street of the city. The Hindoos were coming.

The Yellow Khan no doubt expected to see the invader of his domains blown to atoms. He was much astonished as were his followers to see that this was not the case.

They halted in sheer dismay. There was the Fakir right side up in the gateway.

But it could not be said that she was not damaged. The shock had been a tremendous one.

The glass in the pilot house and all the windows, though of heaviest

plate, was shattered. But the bullet proof screens, of course, yet protected them.

There were great dents and ragged gaps in her metal sheathing. Her guard rails were in many places shattered.

And her interior was a total wreck. Almost everything breakable was piled up in heaps. Frank went to the keyboard and tried the keys. To his dismay he found that they refused to work.

This was evidence that the machinery was damaged.

The Fakir could not be made to move in any direction. It was a critical and somewhat disheartening situation.

"We are stuck!" declared the young inventor. "It will not be easy for us to get out of this scrape."

"It is plain that the Khan did not profit by his lesson," said Barton.

"That is true," said Frank, grimly. "I will square accounts with him. But it is not at all impossible but that he has the best of us. We are badly crippled. We must make all preparations for a hard fight."

Frank went down into the engine-room. He saw at a glance that the machinery, if not absolutely beyond repair, would need much time and work to again restore.

Barney and Pomp were doing some tall hustling to get things to rights again aboard the Fakir. Everything had received a fearful shaking up.

Meanwhile the Hindoos had been hovering about at a safe distance, and wondering if their foe was crippled. This fact Frank knew well could not be long kept from them.

It behooved the adventurers to put things in a defensible shape just as quickly as possible. Frank now went out and inspected the electric gun.

This, to his gratification, he found to be all right. He placed a bomb in the breech and adjusted it to command the street beyond, for he was not sure at what moment the foe would attack the machine.

And it was better to be ready. He could see the Kahn's soldiers massing in the side streets.

Then Frank went back to the engine-room. He placed Pomp and Barton on guard, and with Barney to assist him at once went to work repairing the engines.

He speedily found that the damage consisted merely of a disarrangement of the parts, and that perhaps four or five hours of hard work would make the Fakir all right again.

It is needless to say that the young inventor made haste. The position of the Fakir was not a safe one.

But they had not been at work half an hour when the sound of firing was heard above.

The Hindoos had come to the attack. Pomp and Barton had opened fire upon them with their Winchesters. In a moment Frank was on deck.

A solid mass of the Hindoo soldiers were coming on the charge down the street. Truly the Yellow Khan was a persistent fighter.

Frank went to the electric gun. He now faced a most unwelcome necessity.

The taking of human life was not at all to his liking. He gazed at the oncoming mass of men. One of his bombs would doubtless destroy a score of human lives.

He shuddered and felt much averse to the contingency. But he shut his eyes and pressed the button.

It was a matter of self-preservation. The bomb struck full in the front rank. It exploded with terrific effect.

For a moment the column staggered. Then it came on again. Truly these Hindoos were gifted with pluck.

Frank wondered at their persistence. But there was no time to lose. The foe must be repulsed at once.

Again he placed a bomb in the breech. Four times he fired.

There was a great windrow of dead and wounded across the street. Human nerve could stand no more of such a thing as this.

So the Hindoos wavered and then broke. They fell back in utter confusion, followed by the bombs. In a few seconds the street was clear.

What was to be done now? The Americans had certainly won the first round. Would the Hindoos venture to make another attack?

They did not at once. They retired to a safe distance and the Fakir was once more master of the field. Frank went back to his work in the engine room.

But he had not been there long when again a warning cry brought him to the deck. The Hindoos had hit upon a new line of attack.

It was one also which threatened the safety of the Fakir. Frank saw that all his ingenuity must be devised to offset it. But he set to work at this in his usual stoical, determined manner.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT GOLD MINE.

THE new method of attack devised by the Hindoos was unique and unusual.

At the right of the gate there was a steep hill. This rose to a height of a full hundred yards. The swartly cutthroats had selected a position up there which overlooked the position of the Fakir.

It was easy for them to congregate here, with a number of powder casks. The street was paved with smooth stone and the machine was right at the foot of it.

The diabolical plan of the Hindoos was to place fuses in these powder casks and then let them roll down and collide with the machine.

Of course the fuse would quickly discharge the powder, and one explosion would seem sufficient to blow the Fakir into atoms.

Barton turned ghastly pale.

"My soul! We are doomed!" he cried. "We can never hope to survive one of those explosions."

"We must avert them!" said Frank.

"How?"

"There is one way only. We must kill fire with fire!"

Saying which the young inventor sprang to the dynamite gun. He had just time to place a bomb when he saw the first cask with fuse lighted coming down the hill.

The method employed by Frank to baffle the plans of the Hindoos was as unique as theirs was to destroy him.

His nerves were steel. He knew that all depended upon his accuracy of aim.

If he missed the mark then all was lost. Death would be sure and quick.

The cask had got well started and was coming full tilt. Frank sighted quickly. His one fear was of overshooting the mark.

If he could throw the bomb even a dozen feet in front of the cask he would explode it, and the peril would be averted. So he aimed short.

The bomb struck just where he wanted it to. The result was a surprise to the Hindoos.

There was a fearful roar, and the cask exploded with the bomb. A great cavity was blown into the pavements. Another crash was coming, however, and Frank fired again.

Another still came bounding down; the baffled Hindoos were bound to go to the extent of their resources.

Again and again the bombs met the casks. Presently Frank had no need of intercepting them.

For the mighty cavity in the street did this. They simply rolled into it and exploded there, tearing the hole deeper into the hill. The Hindoos' clever scheme had failed.

Barton had watched all with dilated eyes. He could hardly believe his senses.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed; "that is the greatest trick I ever saw done. These blooming idiots are no match for you, Mr. Reade!"

"I am not sure of that," said Frank, with a smile. "Wait and see what they will devise next."

Frank had dispelled the gang from the hill with a couple of bombs. As the coast was now clear once more, he went back to his work.

The Yellow Khan must, by this time, have deemed the travelers utterly invincible. Every scheme he had tried against them had failed.

Frank and Barney worked like Trojans for the next two hours to get the machinery in order. The Hindoos refrained from another attack.

Piece by piece the machinery was put together. The Fakir was rapidly getting back into condition for travel.

It was near the close of the day when Frank drove the last rivet, and cried:

"We are all right once more. Now we can laugh at our foes!"

He sprang to the keyboard and pressed the motor button. The machine rolled forward easily. She responded to every call.

The voyagers were so delighted that they could not help a rousing cheer. It was, indeed, a victory.

The Hindoos kept sullen silence. Few of them were in sight. Frank had no idea what the Kahn's plan was until Barton exclaimed:

"By Jove! Do you know what they are doing?"

"What?" asked Frank.

"Digging a tunnel under us. They mean to undermine us."

The Englishman pointed to a spot just a few yards outside the city walls.

A line of natives were carrying dirt in hand-barrows from a cavity in the ground. There was no doubt but that Barton was right.

"Whew!" exclaimed Frank; "that would be serious for us ordinarily; but I think we can laugh at it now."

With which he ran the Fakir outside the city walls. The workmen dropped their barrows and fled. They saw that again their plan was a failure.

Frank looked back at the Hindoo city. He yet felt wrathful toward the Khan.

But, on the whole, he believed that he had done the place damage enough.

He had wrecked the fine palace and killed a large number of the foe. He was inclined to be satisfied.

"Osro is a churlish and treacherous villain," he declared. "Let him live here in his own way. We have no further use for him."

"That is the proper way to look at it," agreed Barton; "there would be very little satisfaction in utterly destroying these people!"

"I do not propose to do it," said Frank; "but—now where?"

Barton looked eagerly at Frank.

"I have a plan!" he said.

"What?"

"Why not visit the Khan's great gold mine up in yonder mountain pass, even if we levied a slight tribute upon it. I can see no harm!"

"It shall be so!" cried Frank. "Go to the wheel, Barney. Will you act as guide, Mr. Barton?"

"Certainly!"

Away bowled the Fakir, leaving the Golden City and the superstitious and clannish Osro, the Yellow Khan and his people far behind. Frank went into the cabin to do some writing.

When nightfall came the Fakir was at the base of the mountains.

From a slightly spur the voyagers could look back and see the Golden City.

And they saw that it was all ablaze with light. It was easy to understand what was going on there.

Beyond a doubt the heathenish priests were holding sacrifices in the temples for their deliverance from the terrible foe. Frank regarded the scene with interest.

"I don't see how the missionaries can ever hope to reform such people as these," he declared; "they will hold to their uncanny rites and heathenish deities as long as they hang together as a race."

"You're right," cried Barton; "the religion of Brahma can never be stamped out!"

"Aside from its barbarous practices, it is not greatly different from the Christian belief," said Frank. "Ah, this is a strange world, with so many different races and creeds."

As darkness had already settled down, it was decided not to go further until daybreak. So all was made ship-shape for the night.

Barton knew the road to the Khan's great mine. In the morning it could be easily followed.

So the voyagers, much tired with the day's exciting incidents, did not hesitate to turn in.

Barney remained on guard for the first part of the night, and was relieved by Popp later. No incident worthy of note occurred.

But with daybreak it was seen that they were not yet done with the Yellow Khan. A glance down over the plain revealed a great cavalcade hastening toward the mountains.

"He has taken a tumble to our game," cried Barton. "They are coming to defend the gold mines!"

This was evident. In some way the Khan had learned or guessed the purpose of his foes. But Frank did not view the approach of the enemy with anything like alarm.

"If we work sharp," he said, "we can get through with the mines and be off before they get here!"

"You are right!" cried Barton.

"Is there a large force at the mines?"

"Never! Of course armed men are there, but you need scarcely fear them."

The Fakir was climbing rapidly up through the pass. The scenery was of the wildest and most rugged description.

As they went higher up a mighty view of the country about was obtained. The Golden City nestled far below in the valley.

The pass now began to broaden, and suddenly they came to three tall statues set in the mountain wall. They were Hindoo idols, and there were evidences that many people paused here to worship them.

"We are quite near the mines now," declared Barton.

"Are they underground?" asked Frank.

"Only in part. The mining is conducted somewhat upon the principle of our hydraulic system. There is a great basin among the hills and the soil, rich with gold, is washed down from the hill sides into sluices. You will see!"

"The region must indeed be rich," said Frank.

"You will find that it is. Many millions have been taken from these hills by the Yellow Khan!"

At this moment the machine had reached the highest part of the pass. Here its walls divided, and Barton directed Frank to keep to the right.

The machine rolled in between two high walls of rock. Then a great hollow pocket or valley right among the peaks was revealed. It extended a distance of fully three miles through the mountain summits. It was about a mile in breadth.

Through its center ran a mountain stream. This was dammed and made a great reservoir. From this the water for the hydraulic mining was secured.

The great pocket presented a stirring scene at this moment. There were legions of half-naked Hindoos at work in the boiling sun.

The voyagers gazed upon the scene spell-bound. Then they were spied by the Khan's guards.

In an instant the alarm was given. Through the valley it resounded like a clarion. The Hindoo miners rushed to arms.

The Fakir glided coolly into the mine, however, and Frank brought the machine to a halt near a stone building, before which were armed guards. These opened fire.

"That is the treasure house," said Barton; "there is where they keep the gold which they mine."

"Probably there is a large sum in there now?"

"Perhaps a million or even more."

"Well," said Frank, slowly; "if we were pirates or robbers, here would be a good chance now to feather our nests. Would there not?"

"Indeed there would," agreed Barton. "Then you do not intend to take any of the gold?"

"It does not belong to me!"

"The spoils of war—they are at war with us!"

"That may be," said Frank, "but in this case it will not justify a theft. We have visited the Khan's mines—we are satisfied. Now let us leave."

Barton was astonished.

"You are not going to claim any of the gold?" he asked.

"Not a cent," replied Frank.

And the machine turned about to leave the place. The miners had been keeping up a desultory fire on it.

Frank did not answer this, however. He emerged into the pass, and very quickly the Fakir was leaving the great gold mines behind.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

WE will now take the reader over a period of three days. During all this time the Fakir had been traveling southward in the direction of Lucknow.

The northern trip to the Steppes had perforce been abandoned. Frank's reason for this was a logical and a strong one.

The machinery of the Fakir had suffered a severe strain in the accident at the city gates. He did not believe that it would hold out for so extended a trip.

It was a disappointment to all, of course; but nothing better could be done.

The purpose of the expedition had been accomplished.

They had discovered and visited the far country of the fabled Yellow Khan.

Barton was disappointed only in one respect, and this was because Frank would not plunder the mines of the Khan.

He had served in the English army and had been trained to believe the property of a foe his lawful spoil. But Frank could not look at it thus.

Every day now they drew nearer Lucknow. Thus far they had encountered no foes, or any incidents of more than ordinary interest.

They had returned by a vastly different route from that used in going. They had avoided the jungle.

As a result they had met with only a few of the Thug class, and these were able to do no harm.

But on the third day after leaving the mountains, the Fakir came to a village of curious natives.

"These people!" said Barton, "belong to the tribe of the Many Faced. They are the most adroit jugglers and thieves on the face of the earth."

Frank was interested.

"Let's make their acquaintance," he said.

"It will be to your sorrow," declared Barton.

"Why?"

"They will surely steal something from us of value!"

"Pshaw!"

"Well, you will see," laughed Barton; "they are able to steal by instinct. Their equal does not exist."

"They are friendly?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Why are they called the Many Faced?"

"For the fact that they are adepts at facial contortion and disguise. Let a man lay hand on you in a crowd. You identify him as you think, but the next instant a totally different person stands in his face. It is very wonderful."

"Facial contortionists, eh?"

"Just so."

The machine ran slowly into the village. In a moment it was surrounded by the strangest people our voyagers thought they had ever seen.

Their dress and manners were much different from that of the average Hindoo. They impressed one at once as sly and shrewd.

The moment the machine came to a halt it was surrounded by the thieving rascals.

They fired all manner of questions and sallies in the Hindoo tongue at Barton, who answered them.

They would have come aboard but for Barton's angry warning to keep off. Then they began to beg.

The Englishman threw them a handful of annas. In a moment the scene changed.

The rascals began to exhibit their gifts in the attempt to win more.

Such facial expression Frank had never seen before in his life. He could not follow it.

The handsome young fellow of twenty became the wrinkled and grizzled old man of eighty. The buxom miss, the aged hag.

And so quickly was the change made that the eye could hardly follow it. This was all very wonderful.

But presently came the jugglers.

Rupees were given them in the place of annas. And remarkable fellows they were.

A great ladder was brought forward. One of them climbed it without any visible support. When at the top he walked off into air and vanished.

When he appeared it was from a thicket near, turning all sorts of wonderful handspings. Then another allowed himself to be buried alive.

It was to all appearances a bona fide interment. Our adventurers watched the operation carefully.

But the victim was placed in a trench and covered up entirely. Then one of the jugglers with his hands pulled up the leaves, branches and trunk of a full fledged orange tree in full bloom, from the top of the grave.

Another shook the branches of the tree, and down tumbled the man who had been buried alive. Then the orange tree faded away and withered and shrivelled until nothing was left.

Such ledgerdemain was unaccountable and inexplicable.

It was all done in the open air, however, and there was every chance for detection. If it was an optical illusion, it was a strange one.

"Can you understand how that is all done?" asked Frank.

"I have tried in vain," replied Barton; "there are no jugglers like

them in any other part of the world. The only conclusion I can reach is that they are aided by the devil!"

"Nonsense," declared Frank. "There is a trick about it."

"Allowing that, can you discover the trick?"

"No."

"Have you any jugglers or wizards in America who can equal these men?"

"I know of none."

"Exactly!" said Barton, triumphantly. "They do not exist anywhere on earth. I tell you these Indian wizards are really in league with some supernatural power."

Barton argued this in vain.

Frank could not be brought to believe it. He was not at all a believer in the supernatural.

Leaving the village of the Many Faced people, they next struck the Ground Dwellers.

These people, burrowed like rabbits in the ground. They crept about on all fours, and hunted incessantly for ground moles, mice and non-poisonous snakes, of which they were very fond.

They were people of a very low order of intelligence, as Frank found, and altogether the most wretched class in India.

Thus the Fakir and its party worked along toward Lucknow. The journey thus far had been a most enjoyable one.

But, when within a very few miles of the Goomtee, a catastrophe occurred which completely changed the plans of all and came near costing them their lives.

The Goomtee was a deep but not very swift river.

There were no bridges, and it was necessary to ferry across. As the current was very powerful Frank had half concluded to trust to one of the ramshackle ferries.

But he finally changed his plans. The machine had swam the river once before, and why should it not now? His mind was made up.

So at a suitable point the Fakir was allowed to slide down into the water. Out into the current she paddled.

It was not half a mile across the river at this point. Ordinarily the machine would have made it in quick time.

But now for some reason or other she seemed to hang in the current. When near mid-stream she seemed to stop.

She trembled all over like a reed. Then Frank heard a peculiar sound like rending wood. He instantly dived down into the store box under the vehicle.

But the instant he opened the trap a mighty current of water came shooting up into his face. He gave a yell and forced the trap down.

"What is the matter?" cried Barton, just appearing on the spot.

"My-soul!" cried Frank; "we are sinking! The Fakir has sprung her aluminum plates!"

"Sinking?" gasped Barton.

"Just so!"

"Put her for shore!"

"It will do no good. Before she gets half way there she will sink. This river is full of saurians, too! We must work for our lives!"

Barney and Pomp were petrified when they heard that the machine was bound to go down. Everybody made a rush for those things which they were anxious to save.

There chanced to be a portable rubber boat on board. This was quickly put out.

The lower part of the machine was flooded as they got into the boat. Barney and Pomp took the paddles.

It was a sad sight to see the Fakir with its valuable equipments being carried away on the river current. Lower she sank.

Suddenly there was a plunge, a rush of the waters and down she went. Tears stood in the eyes of all.

"That is too bad!" cried Barton; "it is an awful calamity."

"It am a drefull shame!" averred Pomp.

"Begorta, there's some things gone down wid her I wud have looked to have saved!" declared Barney.

But there was no helping the catastrophe now.

All that the voyagers could do was to get ashore as quickly as possible. How far they were from human habitation they knew not.

"It's a walk to Lucknow!" declared Barney. "Shure, I'm not in love wid me job!"

"Huh! reckon we am gwine to hab a tough time now!" declared Pomp.

"Perhaps not!" said Frank, cheerily; "about how far are we from Lucknow, Barton?"

"I don't believe it's over twenty or thirty miles!"

"That's it exactly. These natives along here are friendly. We will find another boat somewhere and just float down the Goomtee to the town!"

"What!" exclaimed Barton. "Are you not going to raise the Fakir?"

"My dear man," declared Frank, "that would be almost impossible. The mud at the bottom of this river is more than twenty feet deep. If we got the Fakir up out of it, she would be damaged beyond all value. No, I fear you have seen the last of the Electric Fakir."

There was a somber silence as this announcement was made. But at this moment the river bank was reached.

And as our adventurers fled out of their boat a cheery voice came down the bank:

"Hello! What the mischief is all this?"

Our voyagers looked up and saw a squad of English hussars on horseback. The leader was a tall, handsome man, with curling mustaches. Barton gave a loud shout of recognition.

"Lieutenant Brophy!" he cried. "Hurrah! this is like old times!"

It seemed that Barton was known to every man in the English company. A pleasant meeting it was.

The story was hurriedly told, and Lieutenant Brophy said:

"I will dismount four of my men, and you shall ride back to Lucknow with us. That is all right. I can leave them here on detail and send their horses back later!"

Our voyagers were glad to accept the kind offer. As it proved their adventures were at an end.

They were welcomed warmly at the British Residency, and here they spent a number of weeks quite merrily.

Barton changed his mind and re-enlisted with his old comrades. He could not abandon a soldier's life after all.

Barney and Pomp, however, were beginning to think of home. So one day the Americans set out for Bombay. Frank had given up all idea of ever reclaiming the Fakir.

He was now anxious to get home, and to work on a new plan for an air ship.

Bombay was safely reached, and they sailed for the Mediterranean.

Back to England via the Red Sea and Suez Canal. Then a steamer to New York, the cars to Readstown, and our voyagers were happy.

They had finished their adventures among the Thugs of India, as described to the reader. For the present, therefore, we will beg to take leave of Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp.

[THE END.]

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